



# Women as Agents of Peace



**I**n 2011, the United States established a national action plan to implement a U.N. resolution that calls for the equal participation of women in resolving conflicts and building peace.

The U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security reflects that countries are more peaceful and prosperous when women have equal rights and opportunities. The plan ensures that gender concerns are fully integrated into diplomatic, military and development activities.

The plan specifies how U.S. international engagements involve women — half the world's population — as equal partners in preventing conflict and building peace in coun-



tries threatened by war, violence and insecurity.

According to President Obama's executive order establishing the plan, achieving this equality is critical to U.S. and global security. The United States joined more than 30 countries that have adopted

Top: Rwandan basket-weaving cooperatives help women earn income and rebuild stability producing craft work for Western department stores. © AP Images

Left: Believing that educating women can help bring peace, Sakena Yacoobi has educated more than 700,000 children through the Afghan Institute of Learning since 1995. © AP Images

similar plans. These are among the U.S. plan's guidelines:

- Promote gender equality and advancement of women and girls in areas facing conflict.
- Support the full participation of women in preventing and resolving conflict and building peace.
- Protect women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by conflict, from gender-based violence, exploitation, discrimination, trafficking and other abuse.



- Promote stability by investing in health, education and economic opportunity for women and girls.
- Provide for disaster and humanitarian responses that respect the specific needs of women and girls.

## Implementing a Vision

In October 2000, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 to recognize “the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building ... and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.”

Lessons from Northern Ireland, Liberia and other areas already had shown that, when involved, women are more likely to support agreements that restore security and services to their communities, without regard to “winning” or “losing.”

Women participants tend to focus on issues critical to peace but sometimes overlooked in formal negotiations, including human rights, justice, national reconciliation and economic renewal. They tend to build coalitions across ethnic and provincial lines and speak for other marginalized groups. They may act as mediators and foster compromise during the rebuild process.

## Early Lessons

The significance of including women in peace and security issues has been demonstrated in many places. Women from rival communities in Northern Ireland built bridges through the Northern

Ireland Women’s Coalition and contributed to the end of a decades-long conflict. Rwandan women helped put their communities on the road to peace and prosperity after the horrific violence between Hutus and Tutsis, and they laid the foundation for the highest percentage of women in parliament in the world.

## U.S. Approaches

The U.S. plan requires government agencies working with other countries to help increase women’s skills for political peacemaking; this includes training women to take active roles in their local and national governments. Other tasks include helping develop laws and policies that promote women’s rights; increasing the capacity of U.N. systems (law enforcement, military and others) to prevent and respond to conflict-related violence against women; and helping ensure women’s equal access to aid distribution and other emergency services.

The State Department is helping to implement the U.S. plan by supporting the roles of women in peace-building and recovery in Afghanistan, South Sudan and Burma, among other countries. In “Arab Awakening” countries, the State Department is supporting women’s participation in politics and promoting their roles in reforming security.

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nepal and El Salvador, the State Department works with women’s groups to pursue justice for survivors of gender-based



Though she lost her son through attempts on her life, Salama al-Khafaji still promotes opportunities for women in Iraq’s government. © AP Images

violence related to conflict. In addition, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) builds women’s negotiation skills in the Mindanao region of the Philippines, trains police in Nepal, and increases the number of registered women voters in Yemen, among other initiatives.

## Guiding Beliefs

The United States recognizes that millions of women and girls worldwide are excluded from public life, subjected to violence or barred from education. Such exclusions inhibit economic growth and opportunity in the countries where they are practiced. They defy America’s sense of justice — the belief that no country can advance when it suppresses half its population and fails to apply those talents, energies and gifts in building a future. The United States will continue to empower women as agents of peace.